



**ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT DECISION NOTICE
for the
Canyon Ferry WMA Pond Construction Project**

**Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
Region 3, Bozeman
July 2016**

Preface

The enclosed Decision Notice has been prepared for the proposed construction of two small water impoundments on the Canyon Ferry WMA (CFWMA) for the creation of shallow wetland habitat for waterfowl and a variety of other wildlife species. Canyon Ferry WMA is administered by the Bureau of Reclamation but is managed by Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (MFWP) through a management agreement with the Bureau of Reclamation. The proposed water impoundments would be approximately 8 acres and 11.5 acres in size. A brood strip for pheasants would also be created (approx. 0.5 acres) as part of the project. The source of water for this project would be the Montana Ditch. Water would be released from the Montana Ditch into the old Ray Creek channel that used to flow through the area for flooding each of the water projects. The project is dependent upon MFWP being granted a Change-In-Water Use Permit from the DNRC, the application for which is currently pending. If the Change-In-Water Use Permit is not granted, then the project will not happen, at least at this point in time.

Both of the impoundments would include a water control structure to control water levels in the ponds to manage for emergent and submergent vegetation for the benefit of waterfowl. The brood strip would be periodically flooded during the summer period to keep the soil moist. The projects are proposed to be completed on a portion of the former Meyer agricultural lease. The agricultural lease on the property became vacant in 2007, and MFWP made the decision to not renew the lease, but instead chose to pursue a variety of wildlife habitat improvement projects on the property including the proposed action.

MFWP's primary waterfowl related objectives on the CFWMA are to improve waterfowl production and recruitment through habitat manipulation and to improve waterfowl hunting opportunities. Construction of the two small ponds will work toward those objectives. Shallow seasonal ponds provide good habitat for breeding pairs, especially for dabbling duck species such as mallards, gadwalls, and pintails among others. MFWP's primary upland game bird objectives on the CFWMA are to improve seasonal habitat for upland birds (primarily pheasants) to increase production, recruitment and annual survival, and to improve upland game bird hunting opportunities. Construction of the pheasant brood strip will work towards achieving that

objective by promoting insect production. Insects provide a valuable protein source for young growing chicks.

Public Process and Comments

FWP is required by the Montana Environmental Policy Act (MEPA) to assess potential impacts of a proposed action to the human and physical environment. An Environmental Assessment (EA) in compliance with MEPA was completed for the proposed project by FWP and released for public comment on May 13, 2016.

The following two alternatives were considered in this Environmental Assessment:

Alternative A: No Action. Under this action the proposed construction of the two small water impoundments and creation of the pheasant brood strip would not occur.

Alternative B: Proposed Action: MFWP would construct two small water impoundments for the creation of shallow wetland habitat for waterfowl and other wildlife species on the CFWMA and create a pheasant brood strip for the benefit of pheasant habitat on the CFWMA

Public comments were taken for 31 days (through June 13, 2016). Legal notices were printed in the Broadwater County Reporter (Townsend), Bozeman Chronicle, and Helena Independent Record. The Environmental Assessment was also posted on the FWP webpage: <http://fwp.mt.gov/publicnotices/>.

Two individuals submitted comments on the proposed project. One individual, speaking on behalf of the Broadwater Rod & Gun Club, was in support of the project. The second individual felt that it was a worthwhile project except for the creation of the pheasant brood strip. He felt that MFWP should not be enhancing habitat for the benefit of a non-native species (pheasant).

The following is the summary of the comment related to the creation of the pheasant brood strip, and FWP's response to the comment.

1. The pheasant brood strip supports a non-native bird. FWP should not be in the habit of supporting non-native species.

MFWP's response: While MFWP recognizes that pheasants are indeed a non-native bird, MFWP's primary upland game bird objectives on the CFWMA are to improve seasonal habitat for upland birds (primarily pheasants) to increase production, recruitment and annual survival and to improve upland game bird hunting opportunities. Construction of the pheasant brood strip would work towards achieving that objective by promoting insect production. Insects provide a valuable protein source for young growing chicks.

Decision

It is my decision, based on the Environmental Assessment and public comment, to approve the proposed action of constructing two small water impoundments and creating a pheasant brood strip on the CFWMA. The proposed actions will work toward MFWP meeting its objectives of

improving habitat conditions on the CFWMA for waterfowl, upland game birds and other wildlife species. The analysis did not reveal any significant impacts to the human or physical environment as a result of the project. I therefore conclude that the Environmental Assessment is the appropriate level of analysis, and that an Environmental Impact Statement is not required.



Sam B. Sheppard
Region 3 Supervisor
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

7/25/2016

Date